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THE PAYS DE MONTBÉLIARD

By PIERRE CHAVANNES

ITS DISTINCTIVE PERSONALITY

The old *pays* of Montbéliard is no longer to be found on political maps of France. When the geometricians of the Revolution split France into fragments, Montbéliard caused a difficulty. It had been united a little while previously, and they tried adding to it Haute Saône, Haut Rhin, and Mont Terrible in succession, for it was Vosgian on the north, Alsatian in the east, and Jurassic on the south. Only in 1816 did the administration solve the problem by dividing it among the three, but even this rough treatment has not destroyed the unity of its people, who know and love their *pays*, recognizing its distinctive personality while none the less playing their part as Frenchmen. The very last invasion, by the welcome American soldiers, showed its sense of the individuality of the *pays*, for the men joined with the villagers in singing, each in his own tongue, the hymns of the American evangelists Moody and Sankey. This Protestantism of Montbéliard is by no means its only distinctive feature. Who that knows the Swiss religious boundaries will need to be told of the many subtle differences that accompany this deep one? The personality of a country is an outcome of a long effort, and, when the struggle is against overwhelming odds, as has been the case with Montbéliard, the maintenance and enrichment of that personality is matter for profitable study. While some districts cannot but develop and maintain a personality, Montbéliard, only twelve leagues by six, seems at first sight cut off from even this possibility. Within its narrow limits are both high plateaus of the Jura and the outposts of the Vosges, while between them lies the open plain.

ITS PHYSICAL DIVERSITY

On the Jura flank we have the chain of the Montagnes du Lomont, with their short sweet grass and their tufts of beech, descending step by step into the busy industrial plain. These steps are built of dry limestone plateaus, where the wild mistletoed pear tree struggles for life on the stony pastures, where bushes of hawthorn and privet and, down below, small woods are the only things that relieve the nudity of the poor grass, easily withered by the sun's rays on these thirsty rocks. But there are green and fertile valleys even here wherever the clays, which hold the water in large subterranean sheets, reach the surface on the flank or at the bottom of the narrow valleys and abundant springs gush out from the rock.

Towards the Vosges the heavy red earth appears, and it gives place in turn to the schists and porphyries and sandstones of the outposts of the

old mountain mass. Here are streams everywhere, and the soil is deep between the rounded hilltops where reign broom and heather and ferns, as they do on the moorlands of Brittany or Limousin.

The plain between the two hill districts is no more unified than they are. Calcareous patches remain in districts that belong really to the north, and the Vosgian rocks show through here and there in the calcareous part of the plain. The calcophile and calcophobe floras carry the same contrast into the realm of life. Towards Luxeuil and Belfort we have red sandstone towns, while Montbéliard is of the beautiful gray stone that gives such a dignity to the old ecclesiastical city of Besançon. And so the contrast works on through all spheres.

ITS CHARACTER AS A GATEWAY

So far from destroying its individuality, the intimacy of these contrasts actually gives the *pays* its character. But it is not only Vosges and Jura that meet in the plain. Alsace penetrates the great Gate of Belfort; the strange course of the Doubs is finally turned towards the Saône and the south; there is contact with Lorraine on the northwest and with Switzerland on the southeast. The plain with all its contacts is the essence of the *pays*, and the two hill borders are, as it were, the lintels of the fateful door through which have streamed for ages, in one direction or another, peoples and armies, races and civilizations, processes and ideas. How can a mere passage land have a personality? Each movement must surely obliterate the work of its predecessors or combine with them to form a mere characterless composite photograph. So it might be were it not for the powers of resistance that human nature manifests, intensifying its character best perhaps in the face of opposition. In this case the great and fateful opposition has been between the Franco-Roman and the Germanic, between the West and the East. The little *pays* has been seized and tossed about many a time, as have all the lands of France's northern aureole between the sea and the Alps; but of old it felt the struggle even more than did its fellows, for it was at the great gate. Its people have had to stand always ready and have learned their lesson of self-dependence, selecting from both sides but remaining true to themselves.

ROMAN CONQUEST AND BARBARIAN INVASION

Such a point of vantage appealed to Roman skill, and, after Caesar's conquest of Sequania, Augustus made a military camp in the *pays* while Agrippa transformed prehistoric tracks into roads for commerce and law and taxes of the empire. His roads can be followed today from the Doubs through the Belfort gate to Basel and the Rhine. Sequania quickly became Gallo-Roman, and the center of the future *pays* was the old Celtic town of Mandure on the Roman road. It was transformed by Agrippa into the Roman city of Epamanduodurum, with forts, temples on its hills, aque-

ducts, arenas, a forum surrounded by portals, and a theater larger than the one at Orange. Under the Romans villas spread along the roads, *coloni* and serfs cleared the valley woodlands and grew wheat, the town became a great market for horses (still reared on the Jura plateaus), the gardens

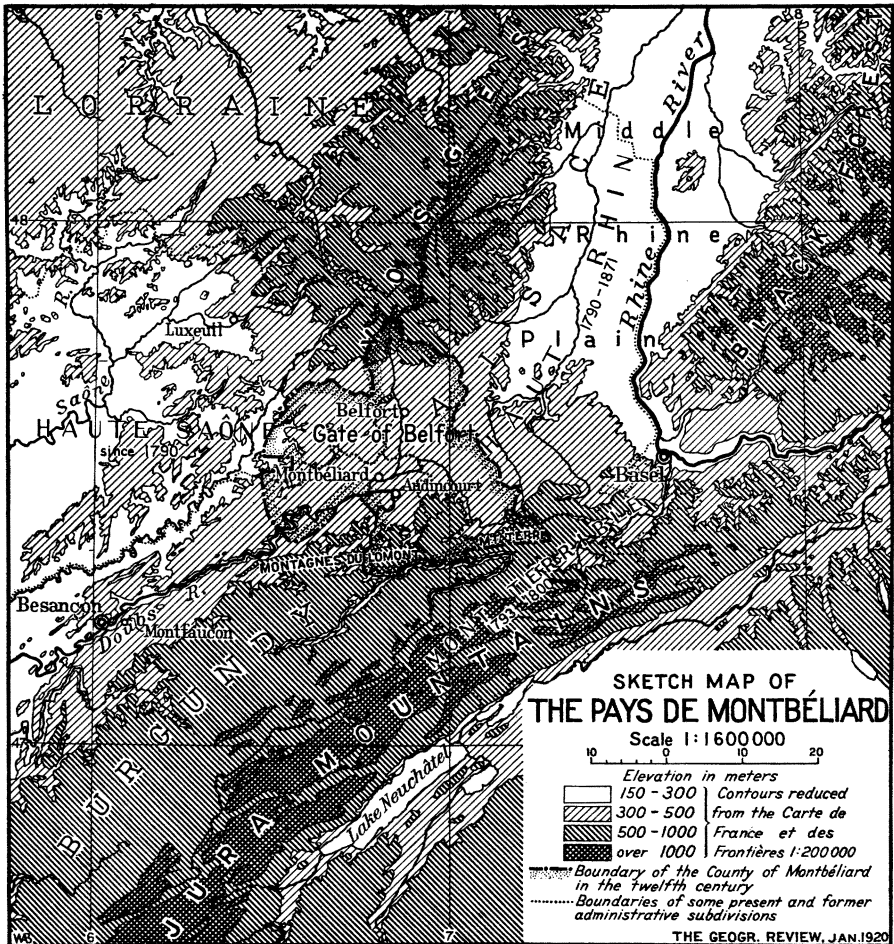


FIG. 1.—Sketch map showing the physical features and historical development of the *pays* of Montbéliard. Scale, 1:1,600,000.

The *pays* lies in the Gate of Belfort, the threshold between the Middle Rhine Plain and the Saône-Rhône depression. The County of Montbéliard is shown in its greatest extension, in the twelfth century (based on F. Schrader: *Atlas de Géographie Historique*, Paris, 1911, Pl. 22). The boundaries are also shown, by faint dotted lines, of the present and former French *départements* among which the territory of the County was divided: Haute Saône, unchanged since its establishment in 1790, occupying the upper basin of the Saône; Haut Rhin, 1790-1871, equivalent to Upper Alsace; and Mont Terrible, 1793-1800, practically equivalent to that portion of the present Swiss canton of Bern known as the Bernese Jura (the last based on map of Bishopric of Basel in *Dictionnaire Géographique de la Suisse*, Vol. 1, Neuchâtel, 1902, p. 155, and map of the Helvetian Republic, 1798-1802, *ibid.*, Vol. 5, 1908, facing p. 564). The name of the last *département* was based on a misinterpretation of the name of one of its prominent features, Mont Terri, an arid, limestone ridge of the Jura Mountains (*teri*, dialectical for *tari*, waterless). The retention in some current maps and works of the name Mont Terrible for the ridge does not conform with best usage (*Dict. Géogr. de la Suisse*, Vol. 5, p. 643).

became filled with walnut, chestnut, plum, and cherry, and peach trees which the Romans had brought from Asia, and finally imperial taxation was added to all these gifts, without adding to their charm.

Christianity followed the legions, and Vesontis (Besançon) for a short space became a sort of Christian capital; but the empire was decaying, and the barbarians soon spread through the great gate. Julian strengthened its fortifications, but along lines that made the *pays* thenceforth only an outpost soon to be lost. Then the story is of Burgundians and of Vandals and after them of the terrible Huns who burned Epamanduodurum; it is a story of ever-renewed efforts to remake the barrier after each invasion, until despair set in. The frontier line is the index of history. Then the tyranny of the barbarian chief replaced that of the Roman tax gatherer. Frank succeeded Burgundian, and the *pays* became a part of Elsgau, allocated at the treaty of Verdun to Lothair I and thus brought into the Empire. During long, confused years the old Romanized Celtic indigenous people slowly assimilated its conquerors, taught them its remarkably distinct and pure dialect of the *langue d'oïl*, though Alsace was Alemannic, and made the Burgundian and Frankish farmer into a sort of rural version of the lord of the Gallo-Roman villa.

ITS RISE TO INDEPENDENCE

The position of Montbéliard gave it a special importance in the days of moving peoples, and, as the movements subsided, it rose for the first time to political unity and independence under Louis de Mousson-Montbéliard, Count of Montbéliard in 1034, and a powerful feudal seigneur. Related to Pope Leo IX and a descendant of Pepin d'Héristal and married to a niece of Hugh Capet, Louis had indeed much to strengthen his position.

The old fight, with the names of France and Burgundy and the Empire to the fore on the one side, and the counts, famous in battle and in pillage, on the other, gravitated for a while towards the Empire; but the accession of the French House of Châlons tilted the scale the other way, and that was continued by the second House of Montfaucon. They were succeeded by the counts of Würtemberg, who split away from Burgundy and, under the leadership of Lorraine, helped to ruin Charles the Bold. During these centuries once more, by playing off one power against another in war and diplomacy, the *pays* managed to maintain its virtual independence under the shadowy suzerainty of one or other side.

In the course of the princely wars the bourgeois gradually seized the reins of government and took part against their princes. By these means there arose all along the great war zone from Flanders to Switzerland that strong municipal life that has left us witness of itself in its *hôtels de ville* and its belfries whence the tocsin called men to defend the civic life. In 1283 the citizens of Montbéliard gained a remarkably strong charter freeing them from all dues to the seigneur save a tax of 12 deniers per fathom of house façade.

Eighteen bourgeois were to be elected by their fellows each year, and they in turn chose an executive of nine for judicial and police purposes; so that in this little aristocratic republic the citizens were judged and ruled by their peers. The nine were required to add three other notables to their number when there was very serious business to discuss. The charter shows a curious foretaste of Rousseau, as it were, for it says that the town is ruled by "*le magistrat*," meaning not an individual but the whole governing body considered as a collective personality including over and above the specially elected men the whole of the town's notables. This system lasted on from 1283 to the Revolution, that is 510 years—a sufficient proof of its strength. When Bernard de Saintes announced in 1793 that he brought the town liberty, the chief bourgeois, Ferrand, could well retort that he was mistaken, for they had long known it.

ITS RELIGIOUS HISTORY

History would have been different had Cleopatra's nose been longer, and, if an heiress of Montbéliard in 1397 had been affianced, like her sister, to a French notable and not to Eberhard of Württemberg, the story of religion in the *pays* would probably have worked out very differently, and its character would have been other than it is. Montbéliard, lying in the Gate of Belfort, feels all the winds of heaven, the mild westerlies with their rain alternating with the dry cold winds from the east. Similarly it has felt the four winds of the spirit, the streams of ideas along the great roads of migration used alike by man and bird. It was notably in the stormy sixteenth century that Montbéliard felt the streams of ideas moving between Lyons on the one hand, with its great market and printeries at a safe distance from the repressive Sorbonne, and Strasburg and Basel on the other, or between Geneva on the one side and Lorraine and France on the other. It became early a place of refuge for persecuted French Huguenots, and its Württemberger count Ulrich, who protected the humanist Reuchlin and hated the monks, naturally looked towards Basel, whence were sent Farel and Toussain. These preachers easily roused the people against the decadent Church and gave the Reformation in Montbéliard a strong Calvinistic flavor; but the princes, with their German connections, later modified the religious organization in a Lutheran direction. Protestant Montbéliard accepted the Augsburg Confession and a somewhat episcopal system; but the princes could not drive away the Huguenot intellectuals, and the spirit remains Calvinistic though the form is rather Lutheran. A very similar feature is noticeable in the Channel Islands, for, though Charles II forced them to accept the Act of Uniformity (1661), the Calvinistic spirit retained the leadership, at any rate until the rise of the Oxford movement. The staying power of the Calvinistic spirit has made it a mighty factor in molding not only the Protestant parts of France but also Germany, Holland, Britain, and the United States.

The Protestants of the *pays* in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries studied for the ministry at Tübingen, and the German element thence derived was of value as contributing a vein of pious mysticism to leaven the theological aridity of the seventeenth century and the rationalistic aridity of the eighteenth. The Moravian influence in Montbéliard, as in many other places, was intimate and quietly powerful, as the wide distribution of the "Sermons de Nordin" in company with the family Bible bears witness.

In the quarrels after the burning of Servetus, Montbéliard took its stand for toleration and for Castellion, who developed an impassioned defense of that principle. Ever since then Protestants of the *pays* have taken a pride in gathering psalms from the Huguenots, chorals from the Lutherans, hymns from America, songs from the latest Welsh revival.

EDUCATION

The Reformation in Montbéliard led to the growth of a system of education with the high ideals characteristic of the Huguenot educators—a system including free tuition and stipends for promising pupils at the Latin school. At the top stood an academy teaching theology, law, and medicine; but, when Louis XIV took the town, he scented an enemy there, and the academy was closed—not, however, until it had conferred on the *pays* almost as clear a superiority as Scotland has so long enjoyed for analogous reasons, a superiority, moreover, which is reappearing under modern conditions of liberty. The Reformation usually also allied itself with the printing press, and Montbéliard undertook the printing of theological works on paper made by mills penetrating into the deep valleys of the Jura.

Discussion naturally promoted initiative, and in the latter half of the seventeenth century Montbéliard took its place in the general agrarian movement of western Europe and made large forest clearings, followed in the next century by the beginnings of nineteenth-century industry.

RELATIONS WITH FRANCE

There is no doubt that Protestantism has been a master factor in the making of the personality of Montbéliard, surrounded as it everywhere is by zealous Catholics; but its Protestantism made less of a breach with France than might be imagined. Some French kings were concerned to maintain good relations with their outposts over against the Empire. Louis XIV, however, was brutal enough until the Treaty of Ryswick made him give up his prey, and the Guises were apt to billet their ill-paid troops on the luckless Protestants and to follow up unchecked outrages by courtly letters of regret. The wars of religion were indeed a bad time for the *pays*, and its people often fled to the forests, even though, as Bohain tells us (1590), the wolves were abundant.

The eighteenth century saw the horrors of those wars grade down into petty legal bullying, and Montbéliard retained its individuality under its prince, whose position at the great gate kept him from degenerating into a comic opera puppet like so many of the other rulers in the minutely divided Germanic lands near the Rhine. His court was a dignified one, as pictured in the memoirs of the Baroness Oberkirch, and to it came thoughtful men of letters and science, the forerunners of the Revolution, which was to attack so formidably the individuality of Montbéliard. Those thinkers, in an atmosphere of education, brought the people of Montbéliard into close sympathy with revolutionary France, though the princes would have preferred to keep the link with Württemberg, the pastors that with Tübingen, and the men of law that with Stuttgart. Montbéliard crystallized out on the French side, Württemberg on the German, and so they naturally drifted apart, though they kept more than one reminiscence of old relationships. The Celtic Gallo-Roman foundation determined the evolution of Montbéliard, the Germanic that of Württemberg. The folklore of the *pays*, for example, is quite Celtic in its ideas about fairies, save that Aunt Aria is partly related to Santa Claus.

The Revolution proclaimed Montbéliard a part of France, one and indivisible; and the sad days of 1870 intensified the people's French patriotism: they had to play once more the part of the outpost. The sculptor Bartholdi has carved a wounded lion in the red sandstone cliff commanding the plain, and at the patriotic festival of July 14 the Alsatians were wont to come to commune with their more fortunate fellow citizens, while, in the place of honor before the Germanic market hall of Montbéliard, is the statue of Denfert Rochereau, "to whom our *pays* owes that it remains French." It has been one of the surprises of 1914-1918 that the German did not dare to attempt the Gate of Belfort; his Belgian crime diverted his energies elsewhere.

EFFECT OF INDUSTRIALISM ON ITS CHARACTER

Nineteenth-century industry has made, as it were, a new region in Montbéliard. Watchmaking, weaving, manufactures of hardware, automobiles, and bicycles have all developed. Many of these industries have been associated with works in Alsace and in Italy, for the purpose of avoiding customs barriers. The influx of Alsatians into the *pays* after 1871 and the spread of Swiss watchmakers and engineers has filled the plain. Men from the hills came down, and workmen arrived from Belgium and from Italy and even from Germany, in the last case mostly to do the rough work the Frenchman hates. None the less, Montbéliard has kept much of the personality it had won from centuries of struggle.

It was an old Huguenot saying that the more blows one aimed at the cause, the more hammers one would break, "*Plus à frapper on s'amuse, tant plus de marteaux on use.*" One may truthfully apply this saying to

the personality of Montbéliard. Like the other Calvinist communities it resisted with the great motto, "In God my strength." That is the actual motto in the coat of arms of the County of Montbéliard, "*En Dieu mon appuy*." But ages of struggle leave their mark, and we must not expect too much in the way of amiability and social elegance in a country of ancient poverty like Montbéliard. It is true that one finds more of these qualities in Flanders and Alsace, which have suffered much from the tramp of armies, but they are rich lands of grass and corn, almost "lands of increment" when once the forests were cleared. They have their *joie de vivre* far more marked than Montbéliard, and they express it naturally through the fine arts. Montbéliard has a hard climate save in spring, and life is a struggle there. If people gathered of old in its towns it was to defend the great Gate of Belfort, and if its rulers welcomed refugees it was to strengthen themselves, much as the Hohenzollerns welcomed and utilized refugees in seventeenth-century Berlin.

ITS CELEBRITIES

Montbéliard has had some interesting celebrities. Bohain, the naturalist, was a son of Huguenot refugees; von Forstner, the statesman, was a religious refugee from Austria; and there are many others as well. Bohain founded a botanic garden at Montbéliard with strong pharmaceutical leanings, and he was one of the early protagonists of the potato, as well as its scientific godfather. Another celebrity was Georges Cuvier, founder of the science of comparative anatomy.

ITS BOURGEOISIE

The Montbéliard bourgeoisie is a solid one, with good doctors, lawyers, teachers, and capitalists, men who may be a trifle slow but are prudent and thrifty and hardworking. They are inclined to cool rationalism rather than to flights of imagination, and this makes their religion somewhat dull and overweighted with mere common sense. There is not here the vigorous realism of the Fleming, nor the glamorous mist of the spirit of the Rhine. The common folk make first-rate foremen and noncommissioned officers. Many other possibilities in them have been checked by the tyranny of industrialism. The quiet solidity just noted owes a great deal no doubt to former relations with Germany, to years of study at Stuttgart and Tübingen; it is closely analogous to the Swiss characteristics of morality without elegance and honesty without radiance. But the vein of mysticism from the Rhine and the Moravian teachers is there none the less. The Swiss have to some extent stirred up the Montbéliardais to emulate them. A Swiss in 1616 established the first iron foundries in Audincourt, and watchmaking was also brought from Switzerland. Though wars have devastated Montbéliard as sadly as Lorraine and though its historical monuments are mostly in ruins or under ground, yet its higher-grade industries have made its villages less

miserable and its houses less fragile than those of its suffering neighbor. They have something of the spaciousness of Alsatian wealth and Swiss comfort about them, just as the cookery in the *pays* has a foundation of tradition of Franche Comté, with borrowings from Alsace and Lorraine. The people are less reserved and suspicious than the poor of Lorraine and of many other frontier zones, and they have a strong initiative which makes them rather ready to emigrate at need. In the eighteenth century they went to Russia. Later they have gone to the New World, to the United States and, more recently, to Canada and to South America. They are industrial democrats in the Protestant plain, and the villages bordering the Catholic hill country are apt to express their anti-clerical bias with some spirit by ringing the church bells long and loud in celebration of the Fourteenth of July, that the silent and often secretly monarchical Catholics may hear and tremble. None the less they are too moderate of spirit for any chauvinism or aggressive nationalism. They rather love a compromise. Up to the present, socialism has remained theoretical, and here we must allow for the persistence of the individual employer, so often submerged elsewhere by the limited-liability company which has accentuated industrial strife.

The *pays* has many interesting industrial agglomerations along the floors of the Jura valleys. As usual, they have swallowed up old villages and are rather amorphous, but they are not composed of sad rows of tenements like the industrial towns of so many British and even French valleys. Here almost every dwelling stands in its garden, and the buildings are dotted about everywhere without plan or order, though industrialism has killed the old beauty of the peasant's house.

Entering into relations with the whole world, industrial Montbéliard has shown itself akin to other industrial areas in the broad humanitarian sympathies of its people, while growing wealth has given it the opportunity of developing the historic sense. May the pushing back of the old menace in 1918-1919 give the *pays* the chance to use its wealth in exchange of ideas between France and Germany and in pursuit of the links between beauty and truth.